House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Harkins: State Tax Returns Should Remain Private

HARTFORD-State Representative John Harkins, R-Stratford, today strongly criticized a legal opinion issued last week by state Attorney General Richard Blumenthal that allows a legislative committee to receive individual tax information of Connecticut residents, including names, addresses and Social Security numbers.

The Legislature's Program Review and Investigations Committee is currently conducting a study of the state's tax system. Committee staff recently sought data from the corporate tax and personal income tax filings from the state Department of Revenue Services. Blumenthal's opinion referenced a 1993 state law, which he categorized as vague, in granting such access to the data.

"This is the most disturbing legal opinion ever offered by the Attorney General," said Rep. Harkins, who serves as an Assistant Minority Leader. "There are few documents as personal as a tax return. It's incomprehensible that the intent of that law was to grant a legislative committee access to specific business or personal tax returns. Not only does this legal opinion grant legislative staff access to this information, it also provides access to third party consultants. It sets an awful precedent for our state, its private citizens and entire business community."

"State government should not have the right to trample on people's individual right to privacy," added Rep. Harkins. "It's bad enough we pay the highest in combined local, state, and federal taxes in the nation. This adds insult to injury that some politicians will go even further in degrading our citizens of their basic dignity and liberty as citizens in our state."

Following the release of the Attorney General's opinion, a representative from the Connecticut Business and Industry Association also raised the possibility that a business' tax return information could later be handed to non-government entities. In addition, Governor M. Jodi Rell expressed concern over a number confidentiality issues involved with granting access to personal tax information.

According to a draft scope of the tax study, the first phase will examine the state and local tax structure to determine how well the system performs based upon naturally recognized criteria. Depending on the outcome of the first phase and the desire of the committee, the second phase may examine various alternatives for change, their potential benefits and drawbacks and how different options might impact different taxpayers in the state.